

VZCZCXRO1655  
RR RUEHDE RUEHROV RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHNR #2164/01 2561326  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 121326Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7051  
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 0396  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002164

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: Somalia - Youth Enrichment Program on the Border

REF: NAIROBI 1324

NAIROBI 00002164 001.2 OF 002

-----  
Summary  
-----

¶1. Following on the success of the inaugural Somalia Youth Enrichment Program (YEP) in April (reftel), the Somalia Unit, including the embedded MIST team, conducted a second YEP in the border town of Mandera from August 25-28. Forty-five mostly Marehan clan Somali youth came across the border to join 18 mixed clan Kenyan youth for a week of sports, cultural activities, and discussions. The youth ranged in age from 11 and 26 years old; most were between 15 and 17 years old. Feedback from the participants and media coverage have both been extremely positive. Atmospherics and dynamics of the week will be reported septel. End summary.

-----  
Activities  
-----

¶2. The August 25-28 Somalia Youth Enrichment Program (YEP) in Mandera, on the border of Somalia across from Bela-Hawa in Gedo Region, proved to be a tremendously successful follow-on to our inaugural YEP in April of this year (reftel). With the cooperation of the Kenyan authorities in Mandera, 45 mostly Marehan Somali youth, 11 of whom were females, spent five days and four nights with 18 Kenyan youth, most of whom were ethnic Somali of various clans. The young people ranged in age from 11 to 26, with most between the ages of 15 and 17. Activities included soccer, volleyball, and handball. In addition, the youth participated in a Quranic recitation contest, an art contest, a poetry contest, and wrote letters to leaders of their choosing, appealing for peace in Somalia.

¶3. The youth came from a variety of organizations in Somalia, including schools, sports organizations, and youth groups. We also had several youth who were reformed militia, having turned away from violence and now engaging in productive activities in Somalia. The youth, initially suspicious of one another and their American hosts, quickly grew into a cohesive unit, supporting one another in the activities and trading ideas in both the formal activities and the discussions that occurred during meals, break times, and in the evenings.

-----  
Logistical Challenges  
-----

¶4. The fact that the program took place in Mandera, over 1,000 kilometers from Nairobi over mostly unpaved roads, made the preparations and execution a challenge. The Somalia Unit's PD

Assistant traveled to Mandera for a week of preparation in July, working on details such as lodging, food and immigration formalities. Most significantly, we were able to secure permission from the Kenyan authorities to have the Somali youth cross the border, which is officially closed, and remain in Kenya for a week. The only condition placed on the activity was that Kenyan youth had to participate.

15. The organizations through which we worked to nominate the youth appeared to have gotten varying levels of information about the event from our primary point of contact in Somalia, resulting in students arriving in various states of preparedness. Many of the students came with no provisions for the four nights at the school dormitory, so they depended on the jerseys we provided and the hygiene supplies we were able to purchase in Mandera. The female participants were required to sleep in a different school from the males, so the program included transportation to and from the primary venue each morning and night.

16. Security proved to be an ongoing concern. The Mandera authorities provided police presence to combat both hostile individuals and the Mandera youth who loitered around the school, and in fact became hostile when not given food or supplies that the program participants were given. The septel cable on atmospherics will elaborate on this point.

-----  
Youth Reactions  
-----

17. The youth, after some initial suspicion about our motives for conducting the program, appeared to react very positively to the week of activities. We were told by our Kenyan drivers, the school administrator, and others that the students asked many questions about why we were there. After being told uniformly by each of the

NAIROBI 00002164 002.2 OF 002

above parties that our goals were to promote reconciliation in Somalia, focus on the role of youth in Somalia, and help the Somalis to rebuild Somalia, the youth seemed to become more open to us and to each other. Several of the poems, peace letters, and art work proved extremely powerful. Post will be exploring ways to compile these items and distribute them more widely both within the USG and within Somalia. The youth also expressed great pride in receiving awards at the closing ceremony for the sports and cultural activities.

-----  
Results and Follow-up  
-----

18. Media coverage of the event is ongoing, and has been very positive. We had several media outlets at both the opening and closing ceremonies, and other media representatives at the activities during the week. Even during the week, after the opening ceremony's coverage was aired, we began getting inquiries from farther inside Somalia about the program and how youth from other regions could participate. In addition, the media covered the youth reading their peace letters. We understand the impact of youth reading their letters and poems, imploring leaders to work more fervently for peace, had a significant impact among concerned parties in Somalia, Kenya's Northeast Province, and throughout the Horn of Africa.

19. While all of the youth certainly benefited from this program, we noted a corps of especially engaged youth who obviously provided some leadership among the youth. We will remain engaged with those youth, hopefully visiting with them in Mandera on future trips and communicating via email and phone until such time as we can meet with them inside Somalia. We anticipate providing some grants to the groups these youths represent, allowing to reach more into Somalia and working less with Kenya-based Somalis.

110. Support from the MIST team, both in terms of personnel and budget, allowed this program to develop into a significantly larger operation than envisioned. We were able to increase the number of

participants from thirty to over sixty. We were also able to provide uniforms, art and writing supplies, and awards in the form of both medals and trophies. This was an excellent example of the benefits afforded the Somalia Unit by the presence of the MIST team.

¶11. The Embassy and the Somalia Unit thank the Department for its support in conducting this program.

RANNEBERGER